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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Letter dated 4 November 1997 from the Permanent Representatives of Japan and Thailand to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

We have the honour to transmit to you the text of the Bangkok Statement: Furthering Asia-Africa Cooperation, of the Second Asia-Africa Forum, which was held in Bangkok from 11 to 13 June 1997 (see annex). The Forum was jointly organized by the Governments of Japan and Thailand, the United Nations (the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the Least Developed Countries, the United Nations Development Programme) and the Global Coalition for Africa.

We should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 99 (b).

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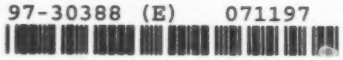

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ANNEX

[Original: English and French]

Bangkok Statement: Furthering Asia-Africa Cooperation of the Second Asia-Africa Forum held in Bangkok from 11-13 June 1997

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 1993 Tokyo International Conference on African Development emphasized the importance of Asian experience for African development. Following that Conference, the First Asia-Africa Forum, held in December 1994 in Bandung, Indonesia, adopted a framework for Asia-Africa cooperation. The Second Asia-Africa Forum, held in Bangkok from 11 to 13 June 1997, was attended by senior officials from 44 African countries, 11 Asian countries, 12 donor countries, 10 international organizations and 4 research institutes. The Forum reviewed the progress made in implementing the Tokyo Declaration and the Bandung Framework, and explored ways and means of furthering cooperation between Asia and Africa. The Forum was also part of the preparatory process for the second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, to be held in 1998. The discussions at the Bangkok Forum focused on the specific areas of capacity-building, sustainable agricultural development and food security and private sector development.

II. CURRENT STATE OF ASIA-AFRICA COOPERATION

2. The Forum reviewed the significant advances made in cooperation between Asia and Africa since the Bandung conference and noted the growing number of bilateral agreements in such sectors as infrastructure, food and agriculture, natural resources exploration and human resources development. It also noted that, in addition to Japan, other Asian countries were emerging as development partners. It was hoped that additional resources could be made available for cooperation between Asia and Africa.

3. It was recognized that trade and investment flows between Asia and Africa, though still relatively low, had been rising steadily in recent years to the point where South-East Asia had become a significant source of foreign direct investment in Africa. Participants were also encouraged by instances of triangular cooperation involving donor and developing countries and observed that such cooperation could be expanded to involve more Asian and African countries.

4. The Forum observed, however, that since development was more a matter of choice than of chance, deepening and broadening cooperation between Asia and Africa required effective political commitment on both sides. While recognizing the significant economic reforms that had been undertaken in many African countries to date, the Forum urged them to intensify the pace of structural transformation of their economies. Among other things, that would provide

improved opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships with Asian countries.

III. ELEMENTS FOR FURTHERING COOPERATION BETWEEN ASIA AND AFRICA

5. The Forum underlined the need for African countries to anchor their development process in their traditions, value systems and cultures. African countries could draw lessons from Asian countries on how to ensure that their development programmes reflected their own priorities. That, together with increased transparency, accountability and good governance, would lay the foundation for long-term sustainable development.

6. Participants recognized the potential for expanding trade and investment between Asia and Africa to levels comparable with those between Asia and other regions as the environment in African countries became more conducive. They also noted the possibilities for broadening triangular cooperation to include private sector, academic and research institutions and non-governmental organizations.

7. While there had been some progress in networking, as recommended in the Bandung Framework, the Forum recognized that more needed to be done in that area. Moreover, the need to establish information dissemination systems that would enable Asian and African countries to expand opportunities for cooperation in various areas and among all partners was emphasized. Areas of cooperation should be clearly defined, with concrete and measurable outcomes.

8. The Forum noted some tangible progress in bringing about good governance and sustainable development. At the same time it acknowledged that human and institutional capacities remained limited in a majority of African countries. They should continue to enhance those capacities, making optimum use of the resources, expertise and skills available to them.

9. The Forum noted the efforts made by African countries to develop an enabling environment for capacity-building, including human, institutional, political and economic aspects. However, it also emphasized the urgent need for African countries to strengthen further their national, subregional and regional capacities to promote the process of integration and to face effectively the challenges of globalization. In order to promote social and economic development, alleviate poverty and support a more competitive private sector, the Forum stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of public sector institutions.

10. The Forum emphasized the need for African countries, in the context of budgetary allocation and public sector investment, to accord priority to education, training, women's empowerment and youth development. It also urged African countries to adopt measures aimed at reversing the brain drain and to retain and maintain national competencies.

11. Given the rapid pace of economic liberalization and globalization, it was suggested that the competitiveness of African countries could be further

enhanced through networking with counterpart institutions and centres of excellence in the Asian region. The Forum noted the usefulness of existing frameworks for bilateral, regional and interregional cooperation, including technical and economic cooperation among developing countries. It also called for increased support for triangular cooperation, and called upon donor countries to provide additional resources. A new development strategy based on a global partnership could also serve as a viable policy framework for advancing South-South cooperation. The Forum emphasized the need to include non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and voluntary agencies, as well as women and youth.

12. The Forum noted that, although African countries continued to rely heavily on agriculture, including animal husbandry and fishery, for both income and employment, the sector was not as productive, efficient or diversified as its potential suggested. The main constraints to increasing agricultural production and raising productivity included the low priority accorded to the sector, poor physical infrastructure, limited utilization of advanced technologies, inadequate access to credit and appropriate technologies for small-scale farmers and the weak linkages between research institutions and farmers. The Forum urged that African countries give higher priority to agriculture and, in particular, to the need for diversification of production in the sector. It was also emphasized that special attention should be paid to the role and needs of women in agriculture.

13. The Forum noted that great scope existed for cooperation between Asia and Africa in agriculture and food security. The areas outlined below were viewed as being of particular importance:

(a) Agricultural research institutes should formulate joint projects with donors, national experts and non-governmental organizations to address problems across all the agro-ecosystems. National, subregional and interregional networking among research institutes should be strengthened in order to facilitate the generation, adaptation, evaluation and dissemination of agriculture-related knowledge and technologies. Asian countries should facilitate the transfer of those technologies, including biotechnologies;

(b) Water resource management programmes should be developed, focusing in particular on establishing irrigation schemes and developing underground water resources. Special attention should also be paid to drought-resistant crops and farming systems that can cope with irregular rainfall. The experiences of Asian countries in those areas should be utilized through technical cooperation projects, including triangular cooperation modalities;

(c) Asian countries should encourage investment in the agricultural sector of African countries. African countries may need to review their land-use policies and legislation, in particular as they relate to land tenure systems.

14. The Forum emphasized the crucial role of the private sector for sustained economic growth in African countries. While it was understood that there was no single Asian model that could be replicated exactly, it was no[t] that successful economies in Asia and Africa had implemented policie[s] and strategies conducive to private sector development.

15. The Forum recognized that there were numerous opportunities for public and private sector cooperation between Asia and Africa in promoting the private sector in African countries. Among them were the development of physical infrastructure and communications, expansion and deepening of the financial sector, managerial, vocational and skills training, promotion of foreign investment and development of joint ventures.

16. The Forum proposed that specific modalities for furthering such cooperation could include bilateral visits between African and Asian countries; development of linkages among private sector groups and associations, networking and sharing of information through exchanges of visits and other mechanisms and utilization of Asian professionals able to undertake short-term assignments in African countries.

IV. CONCLUSION

17. The Forum reiterated its strong support for the second Tokyo International Conference on African Development and the preparatory process currently under way. The results achieved in the Forum also serve as inputs into the Conference.

18. The Forum agreed that a third Asia-Africa Forum should be held devoted to assessing the progress of cooperation between Asia and Africa in the light of the outcome of the Conference. It expressed the firm belief that such cooperation would, in the foreseeable future, represent a major component of the new emerging global partnership.

19. Finally, the Forum expressed its gratitude to the Government and people of Thailand for the warm and generous hospitality extended to the participants and the excellent facilities provided, which created a conducive atmosphere for a productive exchange of views.